



Fall 2019

To Maine's Municipal Officials,

Thank you for operating a recycling program in your town. Maine people overwhelmingly want access to recycling. We recognize the cost burden of managing municipal solid waste through your annual budget, and we know that market changes for recycled commodities are currently upending many of Maine's recycling programs. That is why we are asking you to join a new statewide effort to reform recycling in Maine by shifting the cost burden away from taxpayers.

At the request of the Legislature, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection will submit legislation by December 16, 2019, that would help solve this problem by establishing equitable, non-taxpayer-funded municipal recycling programs for packaging waste. This type of "extended producer responsibility" law has the power to:

- **Save Maine municipalities between \$16 and \$17.5 million each year.** Cities and towns would be reimbursed for any recycling costs by the corporations and brand owners that produce packaging into our state, like is done all over the world. Towns would still have control over their recycling programs; and could keep any revenues generated.
- **Protect our recycling programs and make them more resilient to market changes.** Right now, many municipalities are being forced to stop, cut back, or pay more for their recycling programs because of the expense. The key to making our recycling programs more sustainable is to change who pays for them.

**How you can help:** One simple way that your municipality can show support for [Recycling Reform for Maine](#) is by adopting the attached resolution language. Please send to [sarah@nrcm.org](mailto:sarah@nrcm.org) by December 31, 2019. We will compile the documents and present them to the Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, who will consider this policy in the winter and spring of 2020.

You can visit [www.recyclingreform.org](http://www.recyclingreform.org) to find more information on this very important policy initiative; including a list of towns that have already supported the resolution. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Sarah K. Nichols, NRCM Sustainable Maine Director  
(207) 430-0170 or [sarah@nrcm.org](mailto:sarah@nrcm.org)



# RECYCLING REFORM FOR MAINE

More Effective • More Sustainable • More Equitable

**Whereas**, Maine’s communities are struggling to maintain, expand, and in some cases are eliminating, recycling programs due to rising costs and difficult-to-manage materials; and

**Whereas**, product packaging, which includes plastic, metal, glass, and cardboard, constitutes approximately 30-40% of the materials managed by weight in Maine’s municipal waste management programs; and

**Whereas**, Maine taxpayers currently unfairly bear 100% of the cost and pay an estimated \$16 million to \$17 million each year to finance the management of this material through fragmented and increasingly expensive disposal or recycling options; and

**Whereas**, producers of product packaging have little incentive to minimize wasteful packaging or increase access to recycling; and there is no organized coordination between the producers of packaging and municipalities that are responsible for disposing of or recycling the packaging materials; and

**Whereas**, producers of product packaging have taken some or all responsibility for the management of post-consumer packaging in other parts of the world, including all European Union member states and five provinces in Canada, and, as a result, have greatly increased recycling rates, expanded infrastructure investment, created jobs, and reduced taxpayer costs;

**Now, Therefore Be It Resolved,**

**We, Maine’s municipalities, support an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Packaging law as endorsed by the Legislature in 2019 through the passage of the Resolve, To Support Municipal Recycling Programs (LD 1431). We believe that this policy will work to make recycling in Maine:**

**More effective:** Producers of packaging materials would have a direct economic incentive to produce less-wasteful packaging that can easily and profitably be managed by municipal recycling programs. Having shared responsibility between those who create the waste and those who manage the waste would foster recycling system improvements and enable greater participation in recycling across Maine;

**More sustainable:** An EPR law for packaging is an insurance policy for Maine municipalities when global recycling markets are unfavorable. The current approach to recycling is not resilient to fluctuations in the global recycling market. When commodity prices fall unexpectedly, towns and cities may be forced stop or restrict their programs; and

**More equitable:** Maine’s cities, towns, and taxpayers are currently footing the bill for a problem they didn’t create. With recycling reform, taxpayers will no longer pay for the cost of recycling since the net costs of recycling would be reimbursed—and the packaging manufacturers that produce less-wasteful, more recyclable packaging would pay less than those who do not. This is a much more equitable way to distribute costs.